

## **Effective Delegation Is Not a Hand-Off or Hands Off Approach - It's both**

By John St. John, MBA, PHR

December 23, 2005

### **Effective Delegation doesn't mean hand-off**

Track and Field is an amazing sport. Whether you run, jump, or a little of both, all track athletes focus on a common goal - Winning! The workplace is no different. In business, managers and employees run relay races every day. New tasks flow through managers to employees, who assume task responsibility. Managers are constantly running beside employees to make the critical baton pass called "Delegation". Every manager faces the terror of passing the Olympic-sized task to an employee and thinking, "Please, whatever you do, don't drop it!" The manager hands off the task, slows to a jog, and then stops. This works well in a relay race. It rarely works in business. *Fact: Managers cannot simply hand off a task and hope the employee doesn't drop it.*

### **Effective Delegation doesn't mean hands-off either**

When passing a relay baton, the runner handing off the baton gives an audible ("Stick"), keeps pace with their team mate, and ensures the baton lands squarely in their teammate's hand. Baton passing is like creating delegates with one exception: Delegation is a transitional time period not an event. The delegation process depends on many variables such as the delegate's confidence, competence, and capabilities. These three variables drive the time-period necessary for a successful baton pass. Managers must keep pace with employees, check progress, and slowly move out of rescue range. Keep in mind, pulling back is not losing touch, but making room for employee growth and development. *Fact: Managers must creatively involve themselves in their employee's task management, without stifling an employee's ability to make mistakes, learn, and grow in their confidence and competence.*

### **Effective Delegation means "A Little of Both"**

Relay racers need team support, if they are to be successful in passing or receiving a baton. Managers must see passing a task as a transitional period of team support. *Fact: In time, managers can space out their task performance checkpoints, and give an employee greater task independence, ownership, and accountability without performing the task themselves.* Delegation mastery is skill that can and should be honed by all leaders.